

Joint House Committee Meeting  
Judiciary & Corrections of the Standing Committee on Appropriations  
3/19/2007

- Budget situation for corrections is exacerbated by the fact that much of the budget is tied to the variable basis of prisoner population
  - Cost-cutting measures that are undertaken to address these variable unit costs are oftentimes partially or completely offset by the increasing prisoner population
  - Action is needed to impact the other side of the equation. Although the number of people who decide to commit a crime cannot be directly controlled, the number of prisoner-years served by these folks can be affected by several methods.
    - Sentencing guidelines could be modified
    - Lower cost sentencing alternatives could be explored
    - Disciplinary credits (a.k.a. “good time”) could be reinstated
    - Parole system changes could be explored
- Disciplinary Credits
  - I understand that others may have concerns about “abandoning” Truth in Sentencing, but I believe that it was not the correct solution to the problem in the first place. Before truth in sentencing was enacted, there was the perception that crime victims and their families were somehow being misled or “in the dark” regarding the length of sentence that an offender would actually serve. Truth in sentencing was seen as the solution to the problem; victims and their families could now be confident in knowing that the offender would serve at least the minimum sentence.
  - Unfortunately, truth in sentencing was not addressing the true root cause of the problem. The root cause was poor communication of sentencing guidelines (including “good time” rules) to victims and their families. Had this been properly and effectively communicated, anyone could easily figure out the earliest release date for an offender just like you can presently under truth in sentencing. It should be pointed out that the Internet has now provided that mechanism for broad communication and I might add that the present Corrections Department web site does an effective job at providing this type of information.
  - The removal of “good time” in favor of truth in sentencing also eliminated an important tool for corrections officers to use to reinforce the kinds of behaviors that we expect offenders to exhibit after their release. This is not merely my opinion but also one shared by several corrections officers I have discussed this with. There are also statistics available from the Ohio Department Corrections that indicate a strong correlation between pre-release behavior and post-release recidivism rates.
- Parole system changes

- It seems to me that a fundamental change to the parole review process (and also the one having a significant effect) is to change the starting point of the deliberations of the parole board. Rather than starting from a position of “the answer is no and we will try to work toward yes”, they should start from the position of “the answer is yes and we will work toward no”.
- There should be greater reliance on recent behaviors exhibited while incarcerated and less reliance on information in a Pre-Sentence Investigation or PSI. Pre-release behavior is documented and corroborated by a variety of means such as Corrections Officers reports, block reports, work reports, disciplinary tickets, etc., whereas the PSI is oftentimes a document that is merely a reflection of the subjectivity of it's author. Another shortcoming of the PSI is that there is a lack of vetting especially in those situations where a plea agreement eliminates the opportunity during trial to test the veracity of facts presented in the PSI.

Respectfully submitted,

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